

## Joachim Metallmann (1889–1942)

Joachim Metallmann was born on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1889 in Cracow and was a Jew by birth. His parents were Menasze (Menasse) Metallmann and Regina (Rifka) née Friedner. His childhood was spent in Cracow, where from 1895 to 1899 he attended the Franz Joseph Primary School, and later the St. Anna Secondary School (at present the B. Nowodworski 1<sup>st</sup> Grammar School). On the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 1907 he passed his school leaving certificate with distinction and entered the Jagiellonian University where he studied Natural Sciences (Physics and Chemistry) as well as Philosophy. Of immense influence on the development of his views were Tadeusz Grabowski, Stanisław Zaremba, Władysław Natanson and Marian Smoluchowski, although his main teacher was Prof. Władysław Heinrich, the eminent philosopher and pioneer in psychological research.

In May 1912 J. Metallmann passed his Ph.D. examinations and on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June of the same year gained his promotion. His Ph.D. thesis, written under the tutorage of Prof. Witold Rubczyński, was highly acclaimed in academic circles and in 1914 – thanks to funding from the Mianowski Fund – it was to find itself in print (*Zasada ekonomii myślenia, jej historia i krytyka*) [The principle of the economy of thinking, its history and criticism]. After the defence of his Ph.D. Metallmann was to continue his studies at the Faculty of Philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in the fields of zoology, botany

and mineralogy; this being motivated by a desire to pass the teaching examinations allowing for employment in general secondary schools. Despite the fact that the period of the First World War was not conducive to the development of academic interests, J. Metallmann passed the first part of the examinations (in Mathematics and Physics) in 1916. He was to sit the second part (in Mineralogy and Botany) two years later, as in the meantime he had been called up to serve in the Austrian Army. The Examination Commission was understanding to the young academic's request to sit the examinations at a later date, thanks to which in February 1918 he gained the right to teach in grammar schools.

J. Metallmann began his work as a teacher somewhat earlier, namely in Mielec at a secondary school in 1917. From 1920 he taught in several schools in Cracow: in the 7<sup>th</sup> Adam Mickiewicz Grammar School, in the 7<sup>th</sup> August Witkowski State Mathematical-Scientific Grammar School (from 1953 the 5<sup>th</sup> August Witkowski Grammar School) as well as at the Chaim Hilfstein Hebrew Grammar School. The young academic was in need of funds to support himself – material considerations (besides the desire to acquire teaching experience) lay behind the need to be employed at several educational institutions.

From 1928 to 1929 J. Metallmann studied abroad. From 1931 he was employed at the State Teacher Training College in Cracow, where he worked until 1939. In 1924 his extensive two-part comparative historical study came out in print entitled *Filozofia przyrody i teoria poznania A.N. Whiteheada* [The philosophy of nature and the cognitive theory of A.N. Whitehead], which the author presented as his post-doctoral dissertation (a critique of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy had also been worked on by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, whom J. Metallmann was to meet during a visit to Zakopane in 1935 and with whom he maintained an acquaintance until the outbreak of World War II). For reasons that remain unknown, the defence of his post-doctoral thesis only came about on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1933 (Metallmann gave his post-doctoral lecture on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June). After the defence he was granted a foreign scholarship and travelled to France, where he spent the school year 1932/1933. During his stay in Paris he met Emil Meyerson, the well-known Polish-Jewish philosopher.

After his return to Poland in the academic year 1933/1934, and already an assistant professor, he started to lecture at the Jagiellonian University as well as at the Teacher Training College in Katowice (the texts of individual lectures as well as the notes to go with them have been preserved at the Polish Academy of Sciences Archive and that of the Polish Academy of Learning in Cracow). At this time he cooperated with many eminent academics, including the well-known artist and philosopher Leon Chwistek, the physicist Władysław Natanson and the logician and philosopher Zygmunt Zawirski.

J. Metallmann's academic interests were basically concentrated on four areas: the economy of thought, Determinism, the link of philosophy with science and the structural formulation of natural subjects.

In 1934 the most important of J. Metallmann's works was to appear – the 2-volume monograph entitled *Determinizm nauk przyrodniczych* [The determinism of the natural sciences]. Two years earlier (on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1934) this work had been presented at an ordinary sitting of the Polish Academy of Learning in Cracow under the title *Determinizm przyrodoznawstwa* [Natural Science Determinism]. The author had presented in it a solution to the problem of determinism in the fields of physics and other natural sciences seen within the context of the revolutionary natural-industrial changes of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The work was to have far reaching repercussions both in Polish and foreign academic circles. The second part of the work – *Determinizm w biologii* [Determinism in biology] – which was preserved in a manuscript form was, after editing by Janusz Mączka, published in Cracow in 2002.

In his final book – *Wprowadzenie do zagadnień filozoficznych* [An introduction to philosophical questions] (Kraków, 1939) – he attempted to fuse two aims: the theoretical and the didactic. The work was to act as a modern textbook for students at State Teaching Training Colleges as well as for students of higher educational institutes. The author's intention had been to produce a work which constituted in its own way a 'critical preparation' in the fight with ignorance and the parochialism of thought horizons, a work intending to arouse the readers' intellectual curiosity and extend the circles of those interested in culture. A lot of emphasis was placed on Metallmann's own method of philosophical investigation. This handbook, written in straightforward and accessible language is to this day still keenly read by students.

J. Metallmann's works gradually reached an increasing number of readers, being also published abroad. As a result the academic, in recognition of his achievements, was to receive full membership of the Polish Philosophical Society in Lvov, of the 'Philosophia' Society in Belgrade and of the International Circle of Biotheorists in Leiden.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1939, at the 7<sup>th</sup> ordinary sitting of the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Philosophy, the Philosophical Commission – in recognition of his services to science, put forward a proposal for him to be made a professor, something which, unfortunately, he was not to see. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of November of the same year, as a result of the Sonderaktion Krakau instigated by the occupying Nazi authorities he found himself amongst the 183 arrested employees of Cracow institutions of higher education. Together with others deemed enemies of the Third Reich, J. Metallmann was taken to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen near Berlin, where he was placed in the so-

-called Jewish Block. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1940 he was transported to the camp at Dachau, and subsequently to Mauthausen. As a result of international pressure, as well as the intervention of German academics all those arrested who were still alive had been released by the end of 1940; only three academics remained in camps, of whom one was J. Metallmann. Given that he did not hide his Jewish origins, the chances of him being released were slim. He was finally transported to the camp at Buchenwald, where he was killed on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1942 (the fact being confirmed in his camp record no. 7927). His wife died shortly afterwards.

The numerous notes left behind by J. Metallmann indicate an advance stage of work on the formulation of his very own conception of the philosophy of nature. In contrast to the tendencies of the day to eliminate philosophy as an academic discipline, Metallmann considered it to be necessary for modern life and treated it as the 'most sensitive seismograph' for all the changes occurring within science. A philosophy based on two pillars – science and culture – became, according to him, closer to an outlook enabling for a better understanding of the surrounding world and having a broad application in the supra-scientific sphere of man's activity. The notes left behind by J. Metallmann allow one to determine the methods of his work into concrete philosophical problems – he would systematically, almost daily, jot down the thoughts which had been aroused by what he was reading as well as by his observations of daily life. He perceived a certain cohesion between the world of physical and psychic phenomena; he was for the theory of evolution, which in his view explained many biological phenomena. He thought that one of the fundamental problems for a philosophy of nature was the question of heredity. Metallmann's tragic death was to unfortunately interrupt his works on systematising the wholeness of his views.

In summing up, one may categorically state that despite his relatively short life J. Metallmann left his mark on the history of Polish philosophical science for being an exceptional figure, an unconventional thinker, a man who in a highly interesting way was able to combine philosophy and science. Full of creative zeal, conscientious and inquisitive he presented in his deductions a rational position, one severely critical of all that was imprecise and muddled in philosophical interpretations. He was to leave behind around 60 publications, not counting those unpublished in manuscript form.

Besides the earlier mentioned works, of the most importance in his academic output should be considered a series of articles published in academic journals: *Elementy determinizmu naukowego* [Elements of scientific determinism], *Podstawy współczesnej biologii psychologicznej* [The bases of contemporary psychological biology], *Na marginesie „Wstępu do filozofii” A. Müllera* [As an aside to A. Müller's 'Introduction to Philosophy'], *Pro-*

*blemat struktury i jego dominujące stanowisko w nauce współczesnej* (his post-doctoral degree lecture) [The problem of structure and its dominant position in contemporary science], *Zagadnienie przypadku* [The question of chance], *Determinizm i pojęcie emergencji w biologii* [Determinism and the concept of emergence in biology], *Nauka, pogląd na świat i filozofia* [Science, world outlook and philosophy].

Joachim Metallmann was not merely a philosopher of science, but also a co-author of the so-called ‘Cracow style of conducting the philosophy of nature,’ which was characterised by combining classical philosophical questions and attention to methodology. In his deliberations Metallmann was ahead of the era he lived in, considered a precursor of Structuralism, the philosophical current which was to see its flowering after World War II. His exceptional hunger for knowledge and his constant doubts, which he shrewdly analysed in the course of his research, were to make out of him a philosopher of no less import than his contemporaries: for his views on scientific knowledge still remain both valid and topical.

### Bibliography

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